



First Coast Guard District

SAFETY ALERT

TWO TRAGIC DEATHS; FISHERMEN CAUGHT IN ROTATING SHAFTS

The Coast Guard is conducting investigations into two recent incidents that involved a fisherman being caught in a rotating shaft in the engine room. Tragically, in each incident the fisherman was killed. In one of the incidents, the fisherman's son was a witness to the casualty.

These accidents are a grim reminder of the hazards of commercial fishing and the need for owners, operators and crewmembers of fishing vessels to take precautions. Everyone is aware of the dangers of rotating machinery but often times shortcuts are taken to solve problems even by experienced people. These deaths, while catastrophic, can be purposeful by serving as a reminder to others who might avoid placing themselves or one of their crewmembers in the same situation.

While the exact causes of these accidents are unknown at this time, there is enough information available to alert other fishermen to take special care. In the first incident, the master of the vessel went down below to clear the bilge suction screen. To accomplish this task, the master had to remove a guard and deck plate to get access to the screen. The screen was located below the shaft coupling to the main engine. The master had his lone crewmember stay in the pilothouse with the engine engaged. After a few minutes, when the master did not return, the crewmember went below to check on the situation. His grim discovery was one that he will never forget. It appears that when the master reached around the rotating shaft his clothing became caught on a bolt of the shaft coupling. He was pulled into the shaft that was rotating at 200 times per minute. The accident happened with such speed that no one could have done anything to stop the accident from happening.

An accident of this type has not occurred in many years here in the northeast, and yet, it happened again three days later. The incidents



are hauntingly similar. In the second instance, the master was working in the engine room with his son present. Apparently, he too was in the vicinity of the rotating shaft and had his clothing get caught. The casualty happened with such rapidity that virtually nothing could be done to save the fisherman. To ponder what the poor son had to witness is more powerful than all the words that have ever been spoken about safety on fishing vessels.

The Coast Guard is asking all commercial fishermen to take special care in following basic safety rules when working around machinery on a commercial fishing vessel:

- Disengage the machinery before working near it
- Do not wear loose clothing in the vicinity of moving machinery
- Guards should be installed in way of machinery that can cause injury to crewmembers, such as gearing, chain or belt drives, and rotating shafting. For documented fishing vessels operating beyond the boundary line this is a federal requirement.
- Machinery spaces should be maintained in a manner that provides safe and free access to all machinery and equipment that may require servicing at sea.

For further information on this Safety Alert contact: Fishing Vessel Safety at 617-223-8440.